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A Theory of Environmental Justice

By Karly Edwards

This paper is a reflection and interpretation of a poem written by Steven Blevins. The author gives an insight to a different aspect of "sustainability", incorporating themes of equity and economic justice. Two apparently distant narratives -

New York

*Birds even in the city
survive to sing about sun-
light straining through the gritty breath
of New York.*

*Tulips, perfect orange
and pink
wide-spread petals
stand miraculously
unpicked.*

*There are horses in blinders
tracing concrete circles
around Central Park,
energy throttled at the mouth,
broken.*

*The elephant caught in its cage
is a beast to see
and be reminded
of the animals who imprison in order to
admire.*

- Steven Blevins

We are all survivors, survivors of our lives and our environments. We wake up everyday searching for the sunlight, the hope that justice will come. We search for justice, justice from systems of domination, from capitalism- an economic system that perpetuates inequity. But only through critical thinking, are we able to process about ourselves, our assumptions our prejudices and our world to finally ask the question: what is justice, and how can it be achieved?

The only way to create economic, social and environmental justice

is by creating equal access and protection of earth's resources through the elimination of capitalism. Because justice is a combination of economic, social and environmental components, an injustice in any of these categories affects the other two. It is not possible to observe any of them as an atom, but rather as a symbiotic cluster. The nucleus of this cluster would be economic justice, with social and environmental snugly beside it. This is because all injustices inherently stem from economic ones, namely unequal distribution of wealth caused by a capitalist system.

All injustices stem from economic injustices, because people are expected to compete for resources. This competition perpetuates the fallacy that there are not enough resources for all people and that humans must fight to gain as many resources as possible before we die. That competition also serves as the foundation for hierarchical and racist thinking, that certain groups of people deserve more resources because of an inherent characteristic or privilege.

It is important that all living beings have the ability to reach their full potential in life and this can only be accomplished when beings are given equal access to earth's resources. Equal access creates justice because one group or trait is not favored over another. While some individuals may need more or less resources, beginning at birth, not the market, I believe every being has the right to

equal opportunity for earth's resources. According to this concept of distribution of wealth I believe strongly in the Karl Marx's idea of "to each according to his [her] needs, from each according to their ability."

In his *Lifeboat Ethics* Garrett Hardin argues that by giving people equal access to earth's resources we are creating a situation where a metaphorical lifeboat will become overcrowded and sink, drowning all (Hardin 1998). I believe that this is a fallacy. By giving all humans equal access to earth's resources we eliminate the competition to reach for the crumbs wealthy members of society leave over. According to Kofi Annan's *Astonishing Facts* of 1998, "the three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined gross domestic product of the 48 least developed countries." This statistic shows the gross unequal distribution of wealth and invalidates the lifeboat metaphor. Those who have most of the earth's resources are exempt from serving the majority of earth's population, which struggles to survive. If all humans were given equal access to resources, there would be no need for the lifeboat.

This is not to say that all humans should have equal and *ample* resources. If the world's population consumed resources at the rate of the United States, there wouldn't be any resources left within a few years. Another of Kofi Annan's *Astonishing Facts* is that one fifth of the world's population, the richest fifth, consumes 86 percent of the world's resources and services. It would not even be possible for the world's population to have that many resources to consume. Equal access to the earth's resources would ensure simply that not one group of the world's population had privileged or unfair access to resources. Essentially,

the economic infrastructure of capitalism would be changed to more of a barter/trade or gift economy and the deconstruction of nation-states and formation of a global citizenship and identity would be created so that access would be to the world's people, not leaders of countries to control the division of wealth and resources.

I define justice as not only equal access to earth's resources created by economic change, but also responsibility and retribution for past actions. This means, in order to truly have a just situation, you must admit that there was an injustice and attempt to find its source and find retribution. Retribution is a cleansing act that allows for a new beginning and fresh start. This is a simple "I'm sorry," that just may not come out in a very simple way.

An example of retribution would be finding companies guilty for contaminating a community with carcinogens and holding it fiscally responsible for the outcomes. This could entail buying out the homes of residents of the community, or paying for it to be cleaned up. There is a difference between revenge and penance. The goal is not to perpetuate injustice by having a society where individuals and groups are constantly trying to avenge themselves, but to have shared responsibility and grievance in order to fully rectify injustices and move forward with creating a more just world.

All injustices stem from economic problems such as unequal distribution of wealth because capitalism is an infrastructure that promotes and survives due to inequality. From my experience at the Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) I see that capitalism flourishes, and management prospers, while those who do the majority of the work at

these hotels see little of the profits. Because workers do not have enough money to survive or proper health insurance, they are unable to live life to their full potential, are subject to higher health risks and have less power to control their environments.

A case I saw where there was gross abuse to an employee by management was while working at the Parking Attendants Rights Committee (PARC) of HERE in Washington D.C. I met a worker who while working on his nine-hour shift in one of the parking garages of the city, was injured by an elevator that had been broken and unsafe for several months. Although workers had told management about the problem, in order to save money he simply did not fix it. After being knocked off the elevator, which takes attendants from one floor of a garage to another by way of a rope with a place to put your feet, this worker could not move and was paralyzed for several minutes. Finally, he was able to drive himself to the hospital, where several internal injuries were found, including to his spine. However, management found that because he was able to drive himself to the hospital, the injury could not be that serious and would not pay workers compensation. In this situation, the worker explained feeling powerless, and that although their work had value to the company, their life did not.

This inequality between management and workers is to the benefit of capitalism while acting as a disservice to the majority of workers. This inequality in power and the negative effects capitalism has on the lives of most workers is economic and environmental injustice. Under capitalism, workers are unable to obtain an equal opportunity to resources such as clean water and air. In addition to unequal access, workers also have a

disproportionate amount of toxic waste in their communities. Because I define justice as equal distribution of and protection of earth's resources and capitalism inherently opposes this, I do not believe justice is possible until we change our economic infrastructure.

While working to change the economic infrastructure to one that promotes equity I believe it is important to concurrently work on social and environmental justice issues. This is why I believe that service is such an important aspect of the development of a just society. This combination of justice being a large movement and local actions is the central focus of the theory at the HERE. At HERE, the president of local 483, Julius DeVera, explains justice as being equivalent to power. Power at the workplace is a catalyst for claiming power in other aspects of workers lives. Because by claiming the power over employers use to manipulate workers and finding power within and power to, also known as power to *do*- or power to make change, humans liberate themselves and the environment.

With HERE, I helped organize student participation and attended part of the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride; an event done in the spirit of the 1960s civil rights bus rides to bring attention to the mistreatment of immigrant workers in the United States. This experience allowed riders to lobby congress and have their voices heard about their jobs and lives. For myself, I feel that the experience allowed workers to take power from politicians to empower themselves and demand that they be given respect in the United States with citizenship and other rights. They were able to accomplish this simply by making themselves seen and refusing to be invisible. The change that workers were able to make

by this ride was to educate and give fear to those politicians who may be from privileged communities and identities that oppress the lives and communities of immigrant workers. Internally, workers claimed power as well, power to continue making change and to believe that their lives do have value.

According to Kimberly Derenzo, (personal communication, Spring 2004) a student also struggling with what is environmental justice, environmental justice is when all humans have the opportunity to live in a clean, safe place. Here we see that although this clearly addresses human interaction in the environment, the environment being where humans live, work and play, it also has a social aspect. It is my belief that Derenzo introduces the basis for environmental justice, which is that environmental injustices breed from social ones.

I agree with Derenzo and Robert Bullard, author of *Unequal Protection* that the environment is not just exclusive of the natural world, but also includes where humans live, work, and play (Bullard 1994). The natural world is a luxury that I believe humans exploit for their own consumption. In truth, consumption is necessary for survival. Every human needs food and water to live. However, I believe that nature and wilderness have become a commodity that humans, and largely humans with access to resources such as money and leisure time, are able to afford.

Inherently I believe there is a flaw with the anthropocentric, or human focused, belief that the environment is something created for humans to enjoy. I believe this is why the workplace, home and community are also very important when we discuss the environment because it reinforces the idea of an eco-

system, that humans are only a part of a larger functioning universe.

I believe that there is an inextricable link between the oppression of people and the oppression of nature and the environment. By oppressing humans, consequentially the environment is also oppressed. There is a logic of domination that justifies subordination. Once we justify dominating either nature or a group of humans, there is a precedent that validates the idea of a hierarchy, or that someone or thing is better than the other (Warren 1990).

This experience is especially true for women, who have been inextricably linked to the environment with the perpetuation of the idea of "mother earth" and the assumption of women as caregivers. Women and nature are also identified with emotions- wild and uncontrollable, which are seen as less valuable than logic and culture traditionally associated with men. Women are subordinated to men then, because they are seen as less valuable. In the logic of domination they are seen as emotional and weaker or in need of protection, ideas we often associate with nature as well thus justifying subjugation.

This is a cycle of domination, the domination of nature and humans. Because environmental injustices breed from social injustices, the two problems consistently feed off one another. If we define social problems as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, ableism, etc. we can see that the effects of these prejudices not only hurt human beings but ultimately hurt the environment as well. Because nature and women are inextricably linked in their oppression, domination of women also explains the domination of nature. This is also true with capitalism, just as workers are dominated, because nature is not given a

monetary value and therefore worth, it is dominated as well.

Although social and environmental problems are intricately weaved together, and wrapped tightly around economic injustices, social and environmental problems are not synonymous to one another. The qualitative factor for separating social and environmental problems is that environmental problems are those directly pertaining to physical, mental and spiritual health. These problems are the symptoms, the effects of social injustices. Because of social injustices, there are environmental ones. I believe social problems are hierarchical institutions, ways of thinking, and actions that perpetuate subjugation, which include environmental injustices. Therefore social injustices are acts such as institutionalized racism and sexism. The fact that these institutions influence women and communities of color into living near toxic waste dumps however, is environmental injustice.

Likewise there is a difference between social and economic justice. While social institutions, ways of thinking and actions perpetuate inequalities that include environmental injustices; I feel it is economic injustices that trigger those institutions in the first place. For example, because capitalism requires competition to stimulate economic growth, it divides people allowing for hierarchies to be created validating unsubstantiated claims that certain groups of people are better than others. Therefore, economic injustice, namely capitalism and the practices that perpetuate its success depends on social injustices to create systems of domination and prejudices so that certain groups of people will work for lower wages and be given less value, and less money, in society. As a resident of Cancer Ally mentions in

Unequal Protection, “we’re all victimized by a system that puts the dollar before everything else. That’s the way it was in the old days when the dogs and whips were masters, and that’s the way it is today when we got stuff in the water and air we can’t even see that can kill us deadlier than we ever thought we could die” (Bullard 1994). This man explains exactly how capitalism reinforces that the dollar is more important than people, and in order for some people to make more of that dollar they use social injustices to keep people separated and dominated.

*Tulips, perfect orange
and pink
wide-spread petals
stand miraculously
unpicked.*

A just world, a perfect world, where flowers go unpicked and both humans and animals live calmly with the satisfaction of being fed and warm, this is utopia to me, this is what a just world looks like. Here, in this imaginary orange and pink world, there is no sexism I live with, no capitalism to dominate us, and no racism or homophobia to battle. Social inequalities do not exist, and humans work collectively to take care of each other and the environment.

This ideal world looks like a close-knit extended family. Locally, citizens work together and trade services instead of like in the real world, where citizens become merchants and business persons, working competitively against each other for money, creating urban sprawl and polluting inner cities while rural areas are given the waste.

The ideal world values motherhood, children and family time. People are able to spend time with family and

parents and are able to raise their children without worrying about who is going to work in order to feed them. These imaginary children can play with those imaginary flowers, because now parents have time to take them places. What parents face in reality, is that motherhood and children are not given value in society. Instead, mothers and fathers are rushed back into the workplace to earn dollars in order to provide for the material things capitalism dictates children need, instead of love and value at home.

Working collectively to take care of each other, I believe that each community or society must agree on what rules for justices are appropriate and how or if to enforce them. I believe that principles of justice in general should transcend time and place, and that as a collective of communities we must apply the principles of respect, appreciation and empathy.

Because environmental problems do not remain local, problems in the workplace transcend nation-states, domestic violence occurs in homes throughout the world and global warming effects us all. Principles of justice must transcend time and place in order to mend all these wrongs.

I know that respect and empathy are interrelated general principles of justice that should transcend time and place in an ideal world, but currently do not. Without respect, the validation of other cultures, empathy the ability to understand and sympathize with those cultures, and appreciation for other individuals and cultures we cannot act as responsible global citizens and critically reflect and act on issues that create injustices for others. For example, without respect, empathy and appreciation for the children of Indonesia one wouldn't care about child labor and the work envi-

ronments they are forced to live under. Likewise without respect for the people living in Australia, under the hole in the ozone, people wouldn't be inclined to address the problem from other parts of the world. Respect without action is nothing though. Respect and empathy are what allow for justice to occur, but in order to undermine capitalism and make a truly just world, direct action must be taken. People shouldn't buy clothes children make in Indonesia or pollute the environment without care to exacerbate the hole in the ozone.

Social and environmental injustices are perpetuated in the real world, by systems of domination needed in order to sustain capitalism. We cannot work within a broken system to create justice, and this is why my flower filled universe is incompatible with the current infrastructure. Trying to create justice in this broken system is putting band-aids on all the symptoms and bruises, but never really addressing the wound. We are powerless because we are divided as humans, and powerless because of the way we treat our environment like another commodity to be traded in society. To end these systems of domination then, we must claim some kind of social power as individuals, not politicians, in order to create a just society. This power must be used to deconstruct hierarchies and institutional powers, instead of reinforcing new ones. Instead we should empower each other and ourselves through respect for individuality, community and autonomy. Achieving these things in a society means reconstructing a just autonomous society that allows all humans equal access to earth's resources without plundering the natural environment.

There are horses in blinders

*tracing concrete circles
around Central Park,
energy throttled at the mouth,
broken.*

In the world today, we have broken ourselves and others to adapt to a society shaped by hierarchies, hierarchies that put some people in power, and keep others powerless. Like those tamed beasts that roam Central Park broken with no voice, no power, some humans remain broken and powerless at the hands of those same drivers that have broken our horses and our wilderness.

I define power as being privilege and opportunity, and this comes from various places. There are many forms of power, including power within, where we empower ourselves and create space for ourselves in the world by conjuring power and space up within our own beings first. There is power with, where we find solidarity with others and strength in uniting together. In contrast to finding power within and with, there is power to (do), where we give privilege and opportunity to someone or something else to make decisions for us.

In environmental justice issues, those that have power are those that have power over, meaning they are able to wield power over other people and environments to sustain privilege and opportunity. These are our employers, controlling where we work, or politicians, controlling how we live, and those that maintain power in the home as well.

Those people that do not have power in society, those that are marginalized or denied privilege and opportunity, are those that are often most effected by environmental injustices. In the case of the citizens of Carver Terrace in Texarkana (Cole and Foster 2001). a community on the border of Texas and

Arkansas, citizens fought an uphill battle to have the EPA and government buy their homes and clean up a toxic waste site, and now superfund site, that their homes were built on. Here, power was wielded by the government and regulatory agencies. In this case, citizens had originally given power to the EPA and government so that they would presumably act in the best interest of the community, in exchange for the grace of not having to address environmental issues themselves. However, when this agency and system failed citizens found power within in, in order to make space for themselves in those agencies and claim the community as theirs.

The way that power is traded is in the currency of grace. Grace is social acceptance. In order for marginalized populations to pass in a white man's world, power within and power to do is traded for submission and the hopes of ease in other parts of our lives. Such as in the case of Texarkana, citizens traded their power originally, in order to live in nice homes. However, when the government and society dashed the hopes of ease in society in exchange for their voices, citizens of Texarkana decided to take power back for themselves and their community.

Here we can see in what ways power shifts and changes, how power is traded and how those marginalized are capable of claiming power for themselves and their communities. It is my belief that women and minorities have historically not been given power in society; therefore all power that is robbed from those who have it is new and gained, not reinstated. Such as in the case of an area bordering Texas and Arkansas, Texarkana, which was community of African Americans who had bought homes in a community where

most White folks had relocated elsewhere. In Texarkana, even when they did make wins with the EPA and government this win was historic for the community and especially women because it allowed citizens to obtain new political strength in their single-issue movement and power within. Everyday women and minorities are making first wins, new power, claiming themselves and their communities for the first time. The shifts that occur in society when women and minorities create space for themselves in society are accountability from the government to serve these populations and empowerment of these groups.

In the end, the EPA and government were forced to buy out the homes of the citizens of Texarkana. This is an example of how those citizens created space for themselves and were able to make their voices heard and claim power from these institutions. By empowering themselves and the community, and finding power to do within themselves, instead of delegating this to someone else, this case proved to not only change their own situation, but to bring attention to the issue of environmental racism as well.

Power to change a situation is based on the idea that individuals are always capable of making that change. This discourse does not validate the racism that communities of color experience and how their economic class and ethnicity influences their experiences. In Laura Pulido's *Environmentalism and Economic Justice, Two Chicano Struggles in the Southwest* she explains her theory of the subaltern (Pulido 1998). Because people are marginalized due to their class and race the two areas collectively struggle to retain power in a capitalist society. Understanding this power

struggle and worker solidarity in this system helps to frame racism in a lens of interlinking poverty.

A case study about pesticide use and the lives of workers in the United Farm Workers Union demonstrates how the lives of the subaltern are dominated by the poverty they live in and racism they experience. This case study takes place in the "big three" agricultural area of California including Kern, Fresno and Tulare counties. In an attempt to equal the distribution of wealth and gain respect in the workplace the health issue of pesticide use (DDT in particular) was the main pursuit in the organizing drive for workers in Delano, California.

In the issue of pesticide use and the UFW's organizing drive, the environmental resource that the union, the subaltern, was fighting for was *uncontaminated* food, *uncontaminated* water and an *uncontaminated* workplace. This is important because it is an equality issue. The owners of the farms, and the majority of those able to consume the food growing on the farms they work at have this privilege and it should not be denied to farm workers because of their race and economic status. The struggle to have access to these resources is a result of struggling against their subaltern status to gain power against systems keeping them poor and marginalized because of their race or ethnicity.

In this case study, the union was able to create one of the strongest union contracts ever for the United Farm Workers. This in combination with other successes such as the grape boycott and smaller contract victories led to one source of power for subaltern union workers. These successes also help to create institutional change by having subaltern populations change how work places operate and what chemicals are

put in the environment. Reflecting on the changes workers were able to make economically they were also able to create identity, community and solidarity.

This case study moves theories of deconstructing capitalism to action guided by reflection and is what I perceive as Paulo Friere's theory of praxis. In order to take theories of deconstructing capitalism we need unions, study and practical examples such as case studies, similar to this one in order to create power and revolution from the subaltern. Because I believe change will come from those most dominated by the current powerful and privileged people at be, the collection of power from laborers in the workplace takes this theory of resisting and deconstructing capitalism into direct action.

Although I see unions as a way to make capitalism "more fair" and that inherently, reforming capitalism is not possible because capitalism cannot be reformed they are still important in deconstructing institutions of poverty and racism. Strong union contracts for the subaltern create power and push towards equality disproving hierarchical ideas that races and classes can be better than others.

Before examining environmental racism one must understand the concept and definition of racism. Racism is prejudice towards another skin color with the political resources to dominate that race. Therefore, I believe that racism is not just hatred of another skin color, but oppression and domination over another person because of their skin color. In this definition then, only white people can truly be racists because they are the only race with the political power to dominate other races. This can be shown in the simple statistic that the only presidents in the United States have been

white. In addition to government, in education there is a chasm between whites and communities of color. According to the 2002 U.S. Census while 26.1 of the population with bachelors degrees are white and 9.5 percent of those with advanced degrees are white only 14.3 percent of the population with bachelors are African American and only 4.8 percent have advanced degrees. Because of this hegemonic power, a person of color may still be prejudiced towards a white person, but because they are denied the power to dominate them, they are unable to be racist toward them.

A differing viewpoint would be from another student of environmental justice, a man of inherent white privilege, who believes that all races have the ability to be racist on a personal level and that racism is when one race judges and takes action against another race. Although I agree that racism involves action against another race, I believe that this definition lacks the responsibility of admitting that inherently in society today, white people are given privileges that other races are not. I believe his theory to be a hegemonic discourse, an action or theory that claims to challenge hegemony, but in reality only perpetuates and strengthens it. While he seemingly tries to create a Color-Blind society and definition he ignores the inherent privileges that white communities have, reinforcing the idea that it is the work of the individual that creates opportunities and this ignores racism. I believe this falls into Laura Pulido's race criticisms where she says, "white privilege is so hegemonic that few whites are even cognizant of it. What appears to be natural and fair to whites may be reinforcing the inequality and subordinated status of non-whites" (p.18). This unfair advantage and hegemony creates an unequal

playing ground where whites are given political power. Because of the assumption of white privilege I believe that this unfair privilege only allows white people political power in society to take action against another race and the only opportunity therefore, to be racist.

Therefore, with my definition of racism, environmental racism then, is the domination and oppression over a race of people by making political decisions that alter where that community lives, works and plays. Because white people are the race predominantly in political power, and they are the only race capable of racism, it is an *act* of racism. This can be shown because white people generally are the decision makers and proceed to dominate communities of color by unequally distributing resources environmental protection and waste. Environmental racism then includes political acts such as denying communities of color funds to improve their school or expanding or creating toxic waste sites on their land.

In the case study of Buttonwillow, California as presented in *From the Ground Up*, residents fought against a toxic dump expansion because as a result of the predominant race of the community, these kinds of environmental acts of violence were repeatedly being committed. At the time, "Buttonwillow [was] also the host of California's three toxic waste dumps" (Cole and Foster 2001). In conjunction to that, "just over 50 percent of the residents [were] Latino" (p.81).

The decision to put the toxic waste dump in this community is an act of racism and violence to the Latino community because as a direct result of systemic oppression, such as strategic toxic waste site put in the community, residents are denied opportunities to re-

sist such violent actions and are disadvantaged in the war waged against them. I feel that this is an act of violence because as a direct result of actions such as moving toxic waste dumps strategically to communities of color, these communities are not only physically harmed, but emotionally, mentally and spiritually as well. Because government and those with privilege and power have the resources to commit these acts I feel that there is a silent war, a war of class and race that those in power are waging against communities of color and the poor.

Another aspect of racism and environmental racism in particular, is when it is institutionalized. This carries the concept beyond the personal, (making judgments and taking action against individuals on personal basis) to acts of violence carried out by government and organizations against communities and people of color. An example of institutional racism and acts of violence to people of color was the initiated ballot proposal of California's Prop 54 also known as the Classification by Race, Ethnicity, Color, or National Origin Initiative by Ward Connerly, a UC Regent among other accomplishments. This initiative would have eliminated the possibility for research and data to be collected according to race.

This proposition, although initiated by a self-identified mixed race African American male does not stop the fact that this is institutionalized racism. I believe that the initiation of the proposition by a male who is mixed-race is an example of tokenism. His opinion is seen that the proposition does not harm communities of color because he is a man of color. Here, we see how the exploitation of Connerly's race serves to attempt and justify the proposition and

use his opinion as the de-validation of other's experiences of racism.

This action perpetuates discrimination rather than eliminating it because although you can erase information you cannot erase prejudice. Because of this, we cannot ignore that we make judgments on people based on their skin. Until we live in a socially just world must acknowledge these differences and their effects on marginalized populations. Not having access to statistics and information that show the correlation between different races, and acts such as rates of infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS for example), education levels and frequency of living near toxic waste sites perpetuates racism by ignoring the fact that marginalized populations are experiencing these negative environmental effects at a disproportionate rate to white people.

*The elephant caught in its cage
is a beast to see
and be reminded
of the animals who imprison in order to
admire.*

It is my belief that we are all imprisoned by our identities, captive audiences to ourselves and our environments and the wonderment we have for life is in direct correlation with the wonderment of who we are. Therefore, critically reflecting on our epistemology and identities that shape it is how I explain my positionality on issues of justice.

I believe what I believe because of the values and assumptions I carry with me. I don't want to live in the prison of malls and stores to admire things I don't need, so I choose to value other things. These values and assumptions are based on the inherent privilege I carry from my whiteness, the inherent

marginalization I carry as a woman and lack of power in society because of my class. I carry the privileges associated with being heterosexual in our culture and I carry it all with an able body.

My identities associate me with both communities of privilege and power, and communities that have traditionally been marginalized. This duality allows me to transcend both worlds and to understand both what it feels like to have inherent privilege and what it feels like to be inherently denied privilege. This is important on how I view justice issues because I believe that until all groups are liberated from oppression, no group is liberated from oppression. In addition to this, I believe most people in society today experience this feeling of duality and that this should give us compassion for those who are marginalized and a sense of responsibility to use our inherent privileges to serve as allies to communities that do not have them.

The identity that I most strongly associate myself with is being a white working-class woman. I feel that I have a unique and undervalued perspective in society as a woman and my eco-feminist outlook (that the domination of women is inextricably linked to the domination of nature) and this shapes how I see issues of environmental justice. Likewise, I believe that being working-class, and feeling the oppression of a capitalist system biases me towards that economic framework because of my first hand experience with its failures and belief that it is not working for me or my class. Because I experience these marginalizations under a white mask though, I know that inherently I am more privileged than others, that my class does not show as my whiteness does. Because of this privilege I can pass into middle-class and upper-middle class with ease and

under the assumption that because I am white those classes would naturally be where I belong (accordingly, only 8 percent of those living in poverty in 2000 identified as white by the US Census Bureau).

Feeling and experiencing injustice makes me want to fight for justice in our world. Witnessing, perpetuating and benefiting from injustice makes me want to fight even harder. I value the lives of all organisms, human and non-human, and this is why I want all organisms to have equal access to earth's resources and the ability to reach their full potential. This value then, drives me to the position that capitalism is bad for a majority of the earth's creatures and their environments and that in order to create equal distribution of wealth and protection of earth's resources we must change that economic infrastructure.

Ending the oppression of capitalism must be partnered with service to humans and non-humans facing injustices to create a cycle of liberation. Defining liberation as, "critical transformation" (Harro 2000). individuals must first wake up, which is "when a person begins to experience herself or himself differently in the world than s/he has in the past" (p.2). Here, we understand the role that we have as individuals in capitalism and consciously choose to change ourselves and society to just ways of living.

Next we must get ready by educating ourselves on capitalism and racism and then diminishing our own personal assumptions and beliefs and privileged attitudes. Working on ourselves, we must then reach out and begin to educate others. Most importantly, in order to liberate ourselves and society from oppression we must build community.

Building community occurs by dialoguing and creating coalitions with both people like us, and those different from us. It also occurs by doing service. Service then has a responsibility to not only help individuals liberate themselves from domination, but to liberate society from these systems of oppression and create new ones. In order to prevent service from simply helping people to sustain in the system we must reflect on acts of service, societal roles and culture and how these interact to make positive changes towards justice. Reflection moves service from just helping meet immediate needs caused by the failures of capitalism and effects of racism into deconstructing the systems, which create the need for service.

Service at HERE is an example how to create positive social and personal change through reflection. Serving workers by carrying out grievances and creating better work conditions means nothing without critically thinking about the role capitalism and racism have in the lives of those workers and how my role in society perpetuates or challenges them. Therefore, by serving and educating myself on systems of domination concurrently I avoid simply perpetuating those systems and struggle to work towards justice.

I know that this is a struggle and that in order to create justice in the world we need to create coalitions and grass-roots movements to find our common goals and positively influence the lives of ourselves and of other organisms. Using those principles of justice that should transcend time and place, principles of respect, appreciation and empathy a better world can be created. Capitalism cannot be reformed and people cannot stand to live with such division of wealth and access to opportunity, but as Freder-

ick Douglass said, “without struggle there is no progress.” Just as those who have experienced and lived through oppressions such as slavery and disenfranchisement did not get to see the fruits of their labor we may not see the end of capitalism, but acts of service and revolution will continue to make progress until those orange and pink flowers of my utopia can grow high, high and higher.

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